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SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/CUBA: LIBERTAD ACT REVIEW

REF: A. STATE 126578
 B. THE HAGUE 458

Classified By: A/DCM Andrew C. Mann for reasons 1.5 (c,d)

¶1. (U) In response to Ref A, following is an analysis of Dutch relations with Cuba in the last half of 2008.
(Note: Ref B reports on Dutch relations with Cuba in the first half of 2008. End note.) The Dutch Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Economic Affairs provided this information to embassy officers.

Political Relations with Cuba

¶12. (C) The Government of the Netherlands (GONL) continues to promote human rights in Cuba actively through outreach to dissidents. In an April 16 address to the Dutch parliament, Dutch Foreign Minister Verhagen said the Netherlands is looking to initiate a dialogue with Cuba centered on human rights and democracy. "Developments in these areas, such as the release of political prisoners, dictate the progress (of the dialogue)." More recently, Cuban FM Roque's assertion that the EU-Cuba dialogue did not allow the EU to interfere in domestic affairs prompted a formal question from the Dutch parliament to the Foreign Ministry concerning human rights. FM Verhagen responded that "during the first session of this (new) dialogue in Paris on October 16, the EU Presidency emphatically raised the human rights situation, the position of dissidents, and the importance the EU attributes to the release of political prisoners. During a subsequent visit by (EU Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid) Michel to Havana, Michel raised human rights in his talks with the Cuban authorities and indicated that Cuba must continue to make progress in the area of human rights, also with respect to the situation of political prisoners. To the Netherlands, human rights are the most important subject in the political dialogue. Because of their universality, these rights can never be a 'domestic issue'."

¶13. (C) Post is not aware of any high-level diplomatic visits between Cuba and the Netherlands in the past six months, or of any official exchange programs between the Netherlands and Cuba. MFA Senior Policy Officer Jan Jaap Groenemeijer, in the Office of Central American Affairs, expects to visit Havana in the first half of 2009. MFA Western Hemisphere Director Laurent Stokvis told Elaine Grigsby, Director of USAID's Cuba Program, October 22 that Groenemeijer, who has followed Cuban affairs for more than a decade, will see if the human rights environment in Cuba is good enough to justify a visit by Stokvis later in 2009. If Stokvis goes to Cuba, he will then determine if it would be appropriate for Foreign Minister Verhagen to visit. The Dutch, therefore, anticipate progressively more senior-level visits to Cuba and greater engagement if they note progress in the human rights and democracy dialogue.

Economic Relations with Cuba

¶4. (U) The primary Dutch imports from Cuba are fruit, inorganic chemicals, and non-ferrous metals - specifically nickel. The primary Dutch exports to Cuba include meat products, factory machinery, and transportation materials. According to Statistics Netherlands (CBS), Dutch imports from Cuba are declining, but exports to Cuba are holding steady. Dutch imports from Cuba totaled 472 million euro (\$647 million) in 2006, 315 million euro (\$432 million) in 2007, and only 77 million euro (\$105 million) from January to June 2008. Meanwhile, Dutch exports to Cuba totaled 71 million euro (\$97 million) in 2006, 72 million euro (\$99 million) in 2007, and 33 million euro (\$45 million) from January to June 2008. (Note: These trade figures likely are inflated because they count goods from third countries moving to and from Cuba via the Dutch port of Rotterdam. The Ministry of Economic Affairs states that Dutch imports from Cuba totaled only 19 million euro (\$26 million) in 2006 and 24 million euro (\$33 million) in 2007 - far less than CBS's figures. Further, the sharp drop in CBS's import figures may reflect the collapse of nickel prices in 2008, from a high of \$15 to a current low of \$4 per pound. End note.)

¶5. (SBU) The Netherlands Council for Trade Promotion (NCH) organized a trade mission to Cuba in March 2008 in celebration of the 25-year anniversary of the sister city relationship between Rotterdam and Havana (ref B). (Note: NCH is a privately funded trade organization not affiliated

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with the GONL. End note.) NCH followed that up with a Netherlands-Cuba business roundtable in Rotterdam on June ¶20. NCH has also formed a separate Netherlands-Cuban Business Council to promote trade between the two countries. Participating Dutch companies include Lippoel Leaf, Fondel Commodities, Rabobank, Sluis Cigar Machinery, Martinair Holland, and Niref Nickel Refining. The private, family-owned Dutch company Indiana Finance continues to be particularly active in Cuba; the company is an off-shoot of Fondel Commodities, which supplies raw materials (including nickel from Cuba) to the global steel industry.

¶6. (SBU) Despite their ongoing trade relationship, the Netherlands and Cuba do not have a formal trade agreement in place. According to the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Netherlands does not consider Cuba a "priority country." The ministry could provide no information about Dutch companies that may have participated in the November 3 Havana Trade Fair. In the wake of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, the Dutch government provided 300,000 euro (\$411,000) for humanitarian aid to Cuba via the International Federation of the Red Cross.

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